



Christian Fellowship at Travelers

The Big Story

We are in the midst of living in a big story and we have the benefit of knowing what the story is all about in the Bible! In this time of season something very significant and beautiful happens. Specifically, we celebrate God coming to earth in the flesh. Jesus Christ is God and was born of the Virgin Mary. So what do I mean about the big story? It goes something like this:

Out of nothing, God created the human race and it was good. Unfortunately sin entered the world through the first man Adam and caused a separation in the relationship between God and man. This part of the story reveals how Christ will overcome sin and Satan (Gen 3:15).

The story continues as God chooses the Hebrew race to bless all nations. It begins with Abraham and develops into something, a nation that grows through the patriarchs of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel) and his sons (the twelve tribes). Christ comes from the seed of Abraham (Gen 12:2-3).

In a little over 400 years, the nation grows to well over a million people. Even so, they become slaves in Egypt. We meet Moses, a humble servant, who is used by God to deliver the nation from bondage. Through 10 plagues, God shows his power over Egypt. The final plague of death, allows them to exit. The Hebrew nation did not suffer death though. God called for each family to sacrifice a lamb and put the blood of the lamb on their doorposts. God would pass over each house when He saw the blood. Christ is our Passover Lamb as the sacrifice of His blood brings forgiveness of sins (Ex 12:13).

Israel was given a promise by God to return to a “land flowing with milk and honey.” This land was Canaan, but instead of going immediately into the land, the Hebrew nation disobeyed God and wandered in the desert for 40 years. The penalty of disobedience was just and also severe. Many would not set foot in the new land. God appointed a new leader, Joshua, who would lead the nation to enter into the Promised Land. An unlikely character in this story was a prostitute named Rahab. She gave sanctuary to some of the Hebrew spies and in return her family was granted safety during the destruction of the mighty city of Jericho. How was this done? A scarlet cord was tied to a window as a sign for deliverance. Christ is our scarlet cord (Joshua 2:15-22).

They continued to conquer the land, but went through a cycle many defines which was defined by..

1. doing evil by turning to other gods and rejecting God
2. suffering for the evil
3. crying out to God
4. a judge raised up to deliver them

Though the Hebrew nation had rejected God as their leader and wanted to be like other nations and establish kings, they remained united. Kings like Saul, David and Solomon were those prominent characters of our story. Saul lost his way, David was a “man after God’s own heart” yet he had some big flaws, and Solomon started real well as the wisest man, but finished lousy giving into the gods of his foreign wives (he had hundreds). Looking at David’s life, he penned 73 Psalms including one revealing how Christ would die (Psalm 22).

The story gets a bit uglier when we read about the consequences of Solomon’s disobedience after his death. The nations get divided into a Northern Kingdom (Israel: 10 tribes) and Southern Kingdom (Judah:2 tribes). Israel is just plain wicked with their worship of golden calves. They are ultimately conquered and dispersed by Assyria and intermarry. They are truly lost. Israel and Judah had 39 kings (19 in Israel who were all evil, 20 in Judah with not even half that were good). Judah survives another hundred years or so. It is worth pointing out that a godly king named Hezekiah ruled during difficult times as Assyria was banging at his door. Hezekiah sought God in prayer and asked the prophet Isaiah to also pray. The result? God delivered His people over this powerful army. During this time of division we read in Isaiah 53 why Christ had to die. He died so He could bring us back into a right relationship with God. It is important to note that God showed his great love to other people groups through prophets like Elijah and Elisha. What about Jonah? Nineveh is an awesome example of an all out act of repentance which stopped God’s wrath pouring out on them. This big story is not just about one group of people. It is God’s love for all people!

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Okay, there is more bad news as Judah is scattered. The last several kings are pitiful and Judah is under a siege resulting in a severe famine. It was so bad that people ate their children and Solomon's Temple, where the people worshiped God, had its valuable articles taken, was burned down along with the destruction of Jerusalem's walls. There is nothing that remains of the glorious past of this nation. God warned the people over and over until there was no remedy (2 Chron 36:15-16). They were deported to Babylon. During this part of the story, we read about a Hebrew man named Daniel and his companions who have an uncompromising obedience to God. It is through Daniel that we see a prediction of when Christ would come to the earth (Dan 9:25) as well as recognize that there is prophecy yet to be fulfilled.

Never did a time exist where God wanted fellowship with the Hebrews to the exclusion of everyone else though. Man, even though disobedient, is pursued by our faithful God who has a plan that is fulfilled even in the midst of a major mess. God did not forget His people during the dispersion. The Hebrew nation was not annihilated.

Here comes some good news. God is faithful! After 70 years of exile God puts things back to order and gathers His people. Under Zerubbabel, the temple is rebuilt. Under Ezra the Scribe the hearts of the people are turned toward God and the love for the Scripture. Finally, under Nehemiah, the city walls are rebuilt. Historically, this would put us at the end of the Old Testament and we would wait 400 years before the arrival of Christ. There would be no other word from the prophets.

The story now leads to the birth of Christ as told in the Gospel of Luke.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be borne will be called holy--the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

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I hope you can see how you are part of His plan and His promises. You are in the big story. Salvation has come to us in Christ alone and this is cause for celebration! As believers, we can always count on God delivering on His promises. Christ is our life and we wait for the promise that He will come again! Our hope is in Him and this is the kind of hope does not disappoint.

God bless you as you seek Him!

Dave Blough on behalf of the CFTRAV Board



Christian Fellowship at Travelers

Pure Joy

Dave Blough— October 2010

There's a story in the Old Testament describing how David was dancing before the LORD with all his might. It was pure joy! This made me think about a story that helped me learn about what joy is really about years ago.

Back in 2002, my daughters and I, along with their friends, were able to purchase some great tickets to see Rebecca St. James. I happen to be someone who enjoys going to concerts, chauffeuring, and hanging out with a lively group of people. Anyway, Rebecca was growing in popularity and she was performing with a couple of other bands that night. The circumstances around this event were kind of strange. The venue changed at the last minute to a nearby college, one of my daughters became sick, and the weather was kind of nasty. Once we got to the college, I thought that there would have been a big crowd, but there wasn't. Before the first band came on, Youth Leaders were allowed to do a Meet and Greet. Since I was, I headed on back. I was pretty excited initially until I heard that Rebecca was running late and was having trouble getting to the college because of the fog. I admit that I really thought that this was some kind of conspiracy due to the venue change because there were not enough tickets sold. It must have been a 'glass half empty' day or something. I was convinced that she was not going to show. Instead, the other bands were there and they were passing out some of their worship materials that we could bring back to our churches as well as field some questions. There was one guy in particular that stood out to me. He just had this big smile on him and seemed to be having the best time ever. A little bad weather or a small crowd didn't seem to phase him at all. I enjoyed being with him.

Well, we wrapped that part up of the evening in prayer and I returned to our great seats. Not too long after, that guy I just met started his set. It was an awesome concert and it was more than just good music, it was joy in worship. What a great gift he had with writing, singing and leading our time of worship. It that wasn't good enough, I was pleasantly surprised that Rebecca did make it to the show and she too was awesome. After the concert, we chatted with the bands for a bit and they even signed our CDs and he guy that I was referring to? He is none other than Chris Tomlin! I am looking at his 'not to us' CD right now and kind of laughing. I knew nothing of him before the concert and now, he is one of the most amazing and popular contemporary Christian recording artists. He is truly like David! As I look at some of his lyrics, I can see why: More than all I want; More than all I need; You are more than enough for me; More than all I know; More than all I can see; You are more than enough.

That Old Testament passage of David means so much to me. Nothing stood in the way of his worship to God. So when I see other Davids with that same joy, like I did with Chris that night at the concert or when I greet my friends who have a heart for God, I am greatly blessed. Is God enough for you? Do you have His joy?

God bless you as you seek Him!

Dave Blough on behalf of the CFTRAV Board



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Dad, Look At Me!

Dave Blough– August 2010

Summertime is fun for a variety of reasons. Families typically are outside more, possibly a little more cheery, taking vacation, having a cookout, heading to the beach and stuff like that. This year we are taking a Staycation primarily because it is a wicked amount of work to pack up the twins and go anywhere. One of the things we have done is take advantage of a swimming pool in our backyard. It is one of those Easy Set pools that are seemingly easy to setup and take down in season. The process was not all that easy initially, but we can manage pretty well now. On these hot and humid days, some of our children and their friends put the pool to good use. Inevitably, I will hear a “Dad look at me!” as a somersault or handstand is performed in the water. Sitting on the deck, I find it to be the best seat in the house. Like me, you may find yourself in a position where watching a Cirque du Soleil event like this just once is not sufficient for children. You have to watch ten or twenty times! What surprises me is that they perform with genuine excitement each time and look for my astonishment at their ability. I most assuredly comply and enjoy watching them continually get better.

As I relate this to my life as a Christian, two Bible passages come to mind. The first is in 2 Peter 1:5-10 which reads as follows: “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice the qualities you will never fall.”

What sticks out to me in that Bible passage are the words “supplement” and “practice”. I am supplementing my faith with these excellent qualities and if I practice them I will never fall. That is assurance! As a Christian, if I am practicing these qualities I will mature. This is important, but not in the way you may think. It is not my performance or achievement before God that matters, but it is the desire to be like Jesus Christ and knowing that because I believe He is God and died for me, I am completely forgiven, accepted and loved. I will not be nearsighted or blind to this.

What about you? If you are not a Christian, you can experience complete forgiveness and the peace that comes from God. I am happy to share with you how that is possible so just let me know.

If you are a Christian, increase those qualities and ask God to look at you. Be excited and remember what has been done on your behalf.

God bless you as you seek Him!

Dave Blough on behalf of the CFTRAV Board

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What Am I Dead Meat?

Dave Blough– July 2010

The title of this month's message is a new expression that some of you may not be familiar with. However, my six year old has coined it in a new way. The context was that there were plans being made by some of the family and he was not included in those plans. You might even say that he was ignored. Instead of responding with the more familiar "What am I, chopped liver?" he chose something different and quite amusing. I now use the phrase as well.

This got me thinking about how I feel when I am ignored. Do you ever feel you have something important to say and someone just cuts you off? Maybe you even hear someone say what you were about to and everyone else around them thinks it was the greatest idea ever! It just plain and simple is not the greatest feeling. I empathize with my son Elijah.

In reality, I come back to asking who knows me and doesn't ignore me? It should come as no surprise to you that I believe that it is God. In the Bible, it is quite clear just how much God knows me. "O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether." When you come to the place when you can have your identity and security in God who cares and knows you, the way you look at life changes. Of course that does not mean you will not be hurt or discouraged, but there is a significant difference in expectations.

When we meet at river terrace, we will read about hope, but I want to leave you with some additional encouragement. The life we live now, though difficult in many ways, is filled with great blessings. Even so, the future for those who believe in Christ looks something like this: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"

I believe this and hope the same for you. God bless you as you seek Him!

Dave Blough on behalf of the CFTRAV Board

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Fathers Day

Dave Blough– June 2010

Since I was about ten years old, I remember wanting to get married and have three children. I can picture myself in my backyard by the fence wondering what my wife would look like and what a family for me would be. Now, after almost 26 years of marriage to my stunningly beautiful wife and mostly obedient 7 children, I realize that I received far greater of a blessing than I ever could have hoped for.

I thoroughly enjoy being a Dad for many reasons. Take for instance today. When I stepped into the house after work, Elijah came running around the corner and leaped into my arms and nearly squeezed my head off. Other times, when I walk home from the bus stop, one or more of my children will run down the street as fast as they can for an equally welcomed embrace. I also had the privilege of taking Hannah out for some driving lessons as she prepares for her road test next week. We had some laughs and a scare or two, but I will certainly remember the special 1-1 time we had. Then there is Luke. In addition to enjoying Mythbusters, we read Proverbs 16 together as part of our goal of becoming the wisest people on the planet. There are 31 chapters in Proverbs so if you read one a day you will have all the wisdom you could possibly need. Noah has just graduated high school and he holds down a part-time but even with his schedule, he willingly provides transportation for me whether it is a long or short trip and I love that time with him. Then there are Isaac and Silas, my 9 month identical twins. I can hardly stop myself from kissing their little pudgy faces off. I am enjoying watching them achieve their significant milestones. My oldest, Abigail, just married Tim recently and we had the best wedding celebration ever!

Words cannot adequately describe how much I love being a father and as you can see, I am in the very unique position of enjoying fatherhood with all the stages of life that lead to adulthood. Diapers and marriage at the same time, I never thought of that as a ten year-old!

As some of you already know, Jesus Christ changed my life and He continues to provide for everything I need. As a father, I am very comfortable knowing that He accepts me as I am faults and all. This is good enough for me. I also recognize that I disappoint both family and friends at times, but there is never disappointment in Christ. As I looked through the 6th chapter of the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, there are some excellent lessons that we can all appreciate and help us live this life abundantly. This is particularly relevant for fathers to think about in their role. Here are the highlights:

1. Fear the LORD your God.
 - a. When I see the word fear, I think of reverential awe.
2. Keep all His statutes and His commandments all the days of your life.
 - a. He knows what is best for you since He created you.
3. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.
 - a. The God we are talking about here is the one and only God and He seeks a relationship with you because He loves you with a love that you cannot fathom.
4. Teach the commandments diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.
 - a. Notice the different times we are to teach: sit, walk, lie, rise. That is basically all the time and we need to be diligent about it!
5. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you
 - a. As I mentioned before, there is only one God. Some of you struggle with the existence of God at all. I know that if you seek Him you will find Him.
6. You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD.
 - a. More excellent advice here!

I eagerly anticipate celebrating Fathers Day at my house this weekend mostly because I know that I will be receiving handwritten cards from my children expressing encouragement to me in their own special way. For you fathers out there, enjoy being one and I hope you have the best Fathers Day ever!

God bless you as you seek Him!

Dave Blough on behalf of the CFTRAV Board

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National Day of Prayer *Dave Blough– May 2010*

This Thursday, May 6, 2010, the 59th Annual National Day of Prayer will take place. This year's theme, from the NDP (National Day of Prayer) website, is "Prayer for Such a Time as This" and is based on the verse from Nahum 1:7 which states: "The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him." You can unite in prayer with so many around the country by participating in a local event, like the one below. Your prayers make a difference.

I was thinking about the theme and the story of Esther immediately came to mind. I will briefly summarize. First there was the King, of Persia, you may have heard him mentioned as King Ahasuerus or King Xerxes (they are one in the same person). Then there was Haman (boo, hiss), also known as the bad guy, who was really, well, bad. The book's namesake was an orphan girl, aka Hadassah, who was taken care of by her Uncle Mordecai since the death of her parents. So, King X holds a banquet and beckons his wife, Queen Vashti, who was not too happy to be beckoned. The whole interaction kind of gets out of control and basically Vashti is banished. One of the king's advisors comes up with a brilliant idea to find another wife for King X. The process was long, but among all the beautiful women that could be found, our Jewish orphan girl named Esther, whose cultural background remained a secret, was chosen to become Queen. Some time after, interestingly, Mordecai learns of a plot to kill King X and saves the king. Haman, a really important guy to King X, we learn, really is not a big fan of Mordecai because Mordecai refuses to bow down to him. Haman is a disturbing fellow, basically, and comes up with a cockamamie scheme to annihilate the entire Jewish race. Mordecai and Esther then have the following exchange in the fourth chapter of Esther which nicely ties into my thought:

*10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him to reply to Mordecai : 11 "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days." 12 They related Esther's words to Mordecai. 13 Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. 14 "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty **for such a time as this** ?" 15 Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, 16 "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law and if I perish, I perish." 17 So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.*

Esther feared for her life and it was justified, but she needed to consider Mordecai's words. Why was Esther Queen? It was for such a time as this. I have asked myself a similar question. Why has God placed me in the role I am in? It could be for such a time as this! The Creator of the universe has perfect timing and accomplishes miracles in and through His imperfect people. It leaves me in awestruck wonder. How about you? Why has God placed you in your position of influence? It could be for such a time as this. Will you ask Him? Will you listen to Him? Will you follow Him? Will you trust Him?

Well, as to the rest of the story of Esther, I have to cut out a lot of good stuff, but here is what happened. Esther reveals Haman's evil plot, Haman is hanged, Mordecai is given a level of prominence, and the Jewish people crush their enemies. You are better off reading the story yourself so if you have about a half hour, that is all you will need to read through the 10 chapters and 167 verses of the book of Esther in the Bible. My challenge for you is to write back to me and let me know how many times the name of 'God' is mentioned. The link to the story is found here:

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/nas/esther/passage.aspx?q=Esther+1;Esther+2;Esther+3;Esther+4;Esther+5;Esther+6;Esther+7;Esther+8;Esther+9;Esther+10>

God bless you as you seek Him!

Dave Blough on behalf of the CFTRAV Board

National Day of Prayer Event: Thursday, May 6, 2010 from 11:30am – 1pm. Please join us for the Connecticut State Capitol Prayer Rally on the north steps of the State Capitol Building (facing Bushnell Park).

National Day of Prayer Website: <http://nationaldayofprayer.org/>

Presidential Proclamation: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/presidential-proclamation-national-day-prayer-0>

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Some Questions to Ponder

James Miller – April 2010

“Don’t worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.” - Robert Fulghum

It really is no surprise that actions speak louder than words. As the quote above causes parents to ponder the influence their daily actions has on their children, so too should the Christian in the workplace keep in mind that their daily actions (or lack of action) is their primary witness to their co-workers. Now please note; I am NOT saying that we can ignore the call to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). However, if you are not living out the hope we have in Christ, then how will our co-workers know that we have a hope they will want to ask us about?

I admit, the analytical nature of my work makes it easy to keep everything intellectual and in the arena of argument and debate, including how I share my faith with others. So to help keep myself on track I have started to ask myself the following questions and related scriptures in regards to how I act (or not act) at work:

- Do I treat my co-workers with respect and dignity, regardless of their position, title, or actions towards me? (1 Thes 5:12, Eph 4:32, Rom 12:16)
- Am I an instrument of justice and fairness, or am I a player of office politics seeking to raise myself by lowering others? (Prov 2:6-11, Rom 12:14-17)
- Do I openly and honestly admit it when I am in the wrong or make a mistake? (Phil 2:3, James 5:16)
- Do I act with humility? (Phil 2:3)
- Do I praise others for their hard work and success? (1 Thes 5:11, Heb 3:13)
- Do I act with compassion and love towards my coworkers? (James 2:15-17) (1 John 13:17-19, 1 Peter 4:10)
- Do I submit to the authority of those in authority above me without compromising my integrity? (Eph 5:21, Titus 2:7-8)
- Am I treating those under my authority with respect, recognizing where all authority truly comes from? (Eph 5:21, Col 3:22-4:6, John 19:11a)
- Am I a servant to those I work with? (Gal 5:13, 1 Peter 4:8-10)
- Do I define myself by my work/job/title, or by who I am in Christ? (Gal 2:20, Matt 22:15-21)
- Am I handling conflict at work in a biblical way? (1 John 4:20-21, James 3-4, Eph 4:32)

Now I have to admit, I am far from perfect in these areas. But, fortunately it is by God’s grace we are saved and by His stripes we are healed! Do not let shortcomings deter you from living and speaking the reason for the hope that is in you. In fact, honestly admitting your faults and showing how God’s grace is working in your life is an important witness to people in the workplace today.

May God bless us as we enter into the Easter season and celebrate the love and sacrifice of Jesus that gives us the reason for our hope.

Christian Fellowship at Travelers



Meet With God and Transform Your Life

Dave Blough – February 2010

Statistics show that most people have never read the entire Bible and, at best, know very little about its contents. That really is too bad since statistics also show that the more time you spend reading God's Word, the less likely you will fall into temptation and sin.

I recently attended a Christian Men's conference in Vermont where I listened to Dr. Woodrow Kroll from an organization called Back to the Bible. For quite a while I have been using one of his books called Read Your Bible One Book at a Time. The concepts are so straightforward and the results are beneficial. Sometimes people look at reading the Bible as such a daunting task, but you will see that it really isn't. I was so interested in some of his stopwatch results on reading the Bible. Did you know that...

1. 26 of the 66 books of the Bible can be read in less than 15 minutes
2. half the books can be read in less than 30 minutes
3. 40 books can be read in less than an hour

Interesting isn't it? Here are some tips that I learned from Dr. Woodrow Kroll to keep you close to God and transform your life.

1. Think **marinate**. God wants to meet with you and by taking a portion of your day to read the Bible, you can know Him better. Taking 10% of your free time in a day would be approximately 48 minutes. You can actually read through the Bible twice in one year with that time. Truthfully, we do have the time, but often not the desire. Our lives would be different if we took the time.
2. Think **memorize**. Read to be transformed and not informed. God only has 1 book and this is the way He chose to reveal Himself to you. It only takes 72 hours to read the whole Bible. It is worth your time to memorize some of it.
3. Think **metabolize**. Allow it to change you to produce energy for vital activities. Make the Word part of you. Eat it up.

God's Word is meant to be read for God's intended purpose and not yours. Live for Him and not yourself.

Hopefully, you are encouraged to take a fresh start today by having the privilege of getting to meet with God daily! While you are enjoying this, here are some excellent resources to keep you connected:

411God: God speaks. He wrote a book and He wants you to know it. Now there is an opportunity to receive one minute of it on your phone through a new service called 411God. The Bible read just for you. You set the time. It is simple, convenient, understandable and life changing. We're all busy people. So, get the Bible on your phone with 411God. Here's how you do it:

1. Go to <http://www.411God.net>
2. Click on "Sign Up Today"
3. Enter your information

Bible Teaching: A gifted teacher of the Bible can be part of your spiritual growth. Listen, learn and enjoy!

<http://www.backtothebible.org/index.php/Today-on-Back-to-the-Bible/Today-on-Back-to-the-Bible.html>

Bible Studies: Beyond reading God's Word is studying it. It is the Holy Spirit that gives insight to understand and God has gifted people to help you in that understanding.

<http://www.backtothebible.org/index.php/Bible-Studies-and-Devotions.html>

Bible Reading Guides: There are many different approaches to reading through the Bible. Pick one that interests you and dig in.

<http://www.backtothebible.org/index.php/Bible-Reading-Guides.html>

Christian Worldview: Just as our bodies need regular exercise to build strength and endurance, so do our spiritual selves. The Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview present a research, study, and networking center for people growing in a Christian worldview (living every area of our lives in obedience to and for the honor of Jesus Christ our Lord). It provides opportunities for searching a wide range of documents and other materials, joining a learning in community, acquiring materials for training others, networking with likeminded Christians, and staying abreast of the latest in Christian worldview thinking. Check out the Worldview Gym with a free trial membership by going to <http://www.colsoncenter.org/isi>. You can also check out the Colson Center Library at <http://www.colsoncenter.org/search-library>.

God bless you as you seek Him!

Dave Blough on behalf of the CFTRAV Board

Christian Fellowship at Travelers



Dale Petersen – December 2009

I love this time of year. Sara (my wife) knows I can be strange – it is just reconfirmed when she discovers me listening to Christmas music on random occasions in September or October. But in most ways, I am very normal. For example, I love Christmas cookies and the festive occasions that go with them. The sweet dough that goes into these small tokens of palatable gold reminds me of the bread of life which I stumbled upon in my time of meditation, this morning, again. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life – he who comes to me will not hunger!” A tragic part of this season, is that there are people in need out there who are really suffering. A more subtle realization is that there are people all around us who are struggling with wants and needs that are not and have not been met as they desire. While I have not yet mastered Paul’s expression of “learning how to be content in all circumstances” I am relearning that the “bread of life” is the ingredient that satisfies the soul and enables us to enter ‘contentment’ even when we see our circumstances as diminished (whatever they may be)! I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Dave Blough – December 2009

Frequently I share sessions at work using Communicator. Once connected, I ask whether the folks on the other side can see what I see. Occasionally I break into the familiar Christmas carol below, but I refrain (ha ha) from singing the whole tune. Christmas is an awesome time of the year and holds significant meaning so I encourage you to take some time to read the verses and the carol below. This is a time of exceedingly great joy and hope and I am thankful to be part of it with you.

Matt 2:9-10 And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

Said the night wind to the little lamb,
"Do you see what I see?
Way up in the sky, little lamb,
Do you see what I see?
A star, a star, dancing in the night
With a tail as big as a kite,
With a tail as big as a kite."

*Luke 2:13-14 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,
"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*

Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy,
"Do you hear what I hear?
Ringing through the sky, shepherd boy,
Do you hear what I hear?
A song, a song high above the trees
With a voice as big as the sea,
With a voice as big as the sea."

Matt 2:11 11 And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Said the shepherd boy to the mighty king,
"Do you know what I know?
In your palace warm, mighty king,
Do you know what I know?
A Child, a Child shivers in the cold--
Let us bring him silver and gold,
Let us bring him silver and gold."

Luke 2:10-11 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Said the king to the people everywhere,
"Listen to what I say!
Pray for peace, people, everywhere,
Listen to what I say!
The Child, the Child sleeping in the night
He will bring us goodness and light,
He will bring us goodness and light."

At the Christian Fellowship, we want to encourage you and pray with you regardless of your circumstances. If you need someone to talk to and pray with, just let me know. We consider it a privilege to walk alongside you and help where we can.

God bless you as you seek Him and have the best Christmas ever!

Dave Blough on behalf of the CFTRAV Board

Christian Fellowship at Travelers



Say the Magic Word

Dave Blough – November 2009

“.. encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances..”

Have you heard a parent ask their child to say one of the “magic” words before they gave the child what they were looking for? “Please” and “thank you” are two words that open up a whole new world to a child as if by magic. When you think of it, it is actually something we should all continually keep in practice. After all, it is good manners! Saying “thank you” brings back fond memories...

I think I was about five years old when I was with my Mom in the First National grocery store in West Hartford, CT. I always liked to go to the grocery store because there was always the chance that I could toss a box of Casper the Friendly Ghost cereal in the cart or some other treat. On one such occasion I was feeling rather hungry and politely requested (meaning I begged) to independently seek out some Animal Crackers. You know, the kind where the box looks like a circus cage of animals? Well, I was granted permission said my “thank you” and went on my way. I was delighted to find them, or so I thought. As I was hungry, I dug into the box then sunk my teeth into a cracker. I quickly noticed that they were not as much the sweet treat as I had anticipated. They were kind of dry and unflavorful (I know that is not a real word but I was 5). Much to my mother’s chagrin, the savory treat was a dog biscuit. I guess the use of the “magic” word, in this case, was not so magical.

Stating the obvious, we are now just a couple of days from Thanksgiving. I suppose some gather the meaning of this holiday is to eat heartily a succulent turkey, fixin’s, and all kinds of pies. Others pause to reflect the significance of the celebration with the pilgrims, Plymouth, Massasoit and the gang. I think George Washington had it right when he said “...it is our duty as people, with devout reverence and affectionate gratitude, to acknowledge our many and great obligations to Almighty God and to implore Him to continue and confirm the blessings we experience.”

But thankfulness is taken to another level when it is done “in all circumstances.” This means during the difficult times of your life as well. I hope you are able to experience this type of relationship and are blessed by it.

At the Christian Fellowship, we want to encourage you and pray with you regardless of your circumstances. If you need someone to talk to and pray with, just let me know. We consider it a privilege to walk alongside you and help where we can.

God bless you as you seek Him and have the best Thanksgiving ever!

Dave Blough





Christian Fellowship at Travelers

You Can't Force Maturity

Dave Blough – September 2009

Those words have more meaning to me than you can possibly imagine. Less than two weeks ago my twin boys, Isaac and Silas, were born almost 5 weeks premature. We were taken by surprise, on September 14th, as none of our other five children were early. We had hoped to be like most other parents who have their babies and then leave within a couple days, but in the case of preemies, you can't force maturity. We only had a few moments with the boys after my wife, Cheryl, delivered naturally Isaac and then Silas (Silas was breech). We would soon find out that Isaac had to receive a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) to move out some of the fluid in his lungs and that he had a birth defect where his lingual frenulum (that thing under his tongue) was abnormally short and there would have to be a procedure performed to correct it. Also, both boys would need to receive antibiotics and fluids from an IV, a heat lamp to regulate their temperature, have their hearts and respiration monitored and keep a close eye on rising bilirubin levels. We are faced with the reality that you can't force maturity.

As I thought about this real life situation, I also saw a spiritual application. There is a passage in the Bible that came to mind and it reads as follows:

While Jesus lived on earth, he prayed to God and asked God for help. He prayed with loud cries and tears to the One who could save him from death, and his prayer was heard because he trusted God. Even though Jesus was the Son of God, he learned obedience by what he suffered. And because his obedience was perfect, he was able to give eternal salvation to all who obey him... We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are so slow to understand. By now you should be teachers, but you need someone to teach you again the first lessons of God's message. You still need the teaching that is like milk. You are not ready for solid food. Anyone who lives on milk is still a baby and knows nothing about right teaching. But solid food is for those who are grown up. They have practiced in order to know the difference between good and evil.

"Anyone who lives on milk" reminds me of Isaac in Silas. Presently, that is the only thing their bodies will accept. They cannot enjoy a filet mignon, manicotti or that delicious lemon dessert at Olive Garden yet. They are not grown up. They are not ready. You can't force maturity. Here comes the difficult part in this month's message. As Christians, we need to make an assessment on where we are at and where we are going. Another passage in the Bible provides insight. It says the following:

This is my prayer for you: that your love will grow more and more; that you will have knowledge and understanding with your love; that you will see the difference between good and bad and will choose the good; that you will be pure and without wrong for the coming of Christ; that you will do many good things with the help of Christ to bring glory and praise to God.

My hope is that you join me in practicing those things because you can't force maturity. By the way, Isaac's procedure was successful, his CPAP removed and both boys no longer need IV's, a heat lamp, antibiotics or light treatment for jaundice. However, please pray that they would be mature enough to eat what they need to in order to be home with the whole family.

God bless you as you seek Him and have the best day ever!

Dave Blough



Christian Fellowship at Travelers

Christian Fellowship

Dave Blough – August 2009

Please standby. Your call is very important to us and we appreciate your patience. Yes it has been awhile since we held our last First Friday Fellowship and it has been difficult for us. There has been a change at our company that no longer allows the Christian Fellowship to gather as a group to worship, pray and invite speakers. We are praying about what to do next. I must admit, this whole situation has given me pause. I have asked myself whether Christian fellowship is important, necessary or even vital at Travelers. Work schedules have been busier than ever, participation in FFF is sparse, and I am not hearing much around the company of any interest. I guess you could say I **was** somewhat discouraged until a couple of things happened recently.

First, I have some very close friends who refuse to allow me to be discouraged. A timely call, an unexpected note and constant prayer helped me. Are you in fellowship with friends like that? Second, I came across something from Acts 2:42-47 providing a picture of Christian Fellowship that lifted my spirit. “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to **fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... and were sharing... praising God and having favor with all the people.” Koinonia is the Greek word for fellowship and it is defined as a close association, community, communion, and joint participation. Charles Swindoll says that the word “sharing” is probably the most descriptive word for it. I agree.

I also realized that we have over a 40 year history of Christian Fellowship, both Travelers and Aetna, led at various points by godly people like Peter Vaughn, Ron Burr, David Noetzel, Lonny Orfitelli, Dale Petersen, Ron Allen, Lori Fusco, Doug Wisneski and Bill Very. Not to mention the many faithful Bible Study leaders taking seriously the charge to make disciples. Over the years we have met in cafeterias, auditoriums, conference rooms and even a church! We have faced tremendous adversity and even hostility. At one time, we even made an appeal to a past Chairman of the Board who granted the re-establishment of the freedom to meet. Through it all, our God is unchanging, faithful and His mercies are new every morning.

I recently read about a man who likened his teaching efforts as attempting to stand on the shoulders of the faithful that went before him. I can identify with that especially looking back at our history. I seek to follow Jesus Christ and I seek fellowship with you. Will you join me? If you have some ideas and are willing to help, please let me know.

By the way, please forward this to all your Christian friends at the Travelers no matter what location they are in. I would like to reach out beyond Hartford and make some new friends. We are one Body after all.

God bless you as you seek Him! Your friend,

Dave Blough

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### **Hartford-area Events (these are the only ones that I know of)**

You’re invited to help us Celebrate India! on Saturday August 29, 2009 from 11am to 5pm at Conard High School in West Hartford, CT. This special fundraising festival is for persons of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy a day dedicated to Indian arts and culture while raising money for the D.F. School for the Blind in Kolkata (Calcutta), India. Come experience the wonder and fun of Indian culture in a family-friendly atmosphere. We need prayers above all and would also welcome folks’ willingness to volunteer as well. For more information, contact Paul Semanski @ 860.798.6073 or [info@celebrateindia.org](mailto:info@celebrateindia.org). Paul works at Travelers in Hartford and spoke about this at one of our last FFF events earlier this year.

Celebrate India Web site: <http://www.celebrateindia.org/>

On Friday, September 11, 2009, Travelers will once again be participating in the Capital Area United Way Day of Caring. The day will provide Hartford-area employees with an opportunity to volunteer for a variety of community activities such as landscaping, painting, and working with children. Specific site information will be available through the registration Web site beginning August 3. Please save this date and join your fellow employees in participating in this most worthwhile event to benefit the community.

Registration for this event will begin Monday, August 3, and end Friday, August 14, at 4 p.m.

United Way Day of Caring Registration Web site: <http://events.prodlb.travp.net/unitedway>

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Christian Fellowship at Travelers

Brace Yourself

Dave Blough – June 2009

Can you pause for a moment and think about something that happened to you that did not seem fair?

Maybe you were like me and a flood of examples came to your mind. Like the time when I was too young to know any better and my siblings convinced me to take the blame for something they did. That was very painful! Or when my cousins said it was OK not to follow my parents back home and stop for some ice cream instead. That was painful too though the ice cream was delicious! As you thought about your experiences, maybe you even began to relive them and became a bit agitated. I know I did!

Brace yourself folks because the scope of unfairness has increased. I read an article today about a San Diego Pastor and his wife that were told that they cannot invite friends to their home Bible study. They were ordered to stop or apply for a permit that would cost them thousands of dollars. If you are not aware, Bible studies occur in homes, churches and even places of work around the world every day of the week. When I think of the potential ramifications, it just does not seem fair. I want to think that this is America and this just couldn't happen in our country. But what was formerly something that hardly would ever be considered, may now become common. If this seems small to you, other freedoms you currently enjoy may be subjected to similar actions.

A Bible verse crossed my mind that is relevant. It can be found in the New Testament in the book of Ephesians chapter six verse 18. It states "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." I have mentioned before that God is moved by prayer. It is not a last resort, but rather the first action that must take place. I believe my God is more than able! Here's a plan of attack I recommend for you next time you are faced with something unfair:

1. Start to share with God about what is troubling you about the situation
2. Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit to guide you in what to do
3. Read Bible passages about similar situations and about God's trustworthy character
4. Ask a friend to join you in prayer and be encouraged

God bless you as you seek Him!

Dave Blough

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If you need prayer, and it is of an urgent matter, let your home church know right away. Let your praying friends close to you know, so they can pray with you on the spot. Finally, send a request to the Christian Fellowship at [cftrav@comcast.net](mailto:cftrav@comcast.net) so we can pray with you throughout the next month.

Christian Fellowship website: <http://home.comcast.net/~cftrav/>  
Join a Bible Study: <http://home.comcast.net/~cftrav/bible.shtml>  
Events you can participate in: <http://home.comcast.net/~cftrav/events.shtml>  
\*Travelers Community Connection: <http://mysso.prod1b.travp.net/gateway.aspx?AppCN=AngelPoints>

\* The Travelers volunteer site promotes "volunteerism [as] an integral part of our corporate culture, and our employee volunteers' skills, expertise and compassion." You are encouraged to log in and create a profile of your interests, skills, volunteer activities in order to link and leverage your talents for the good of the community and be a blessing to others.



## *Christian Fellowship* at Travelers

### **Faceoff**

*Dave Blough – April 2009*

It was the winter of 1976 and me and the guys were getting ready for some street hockey in a small driveway (we weren't that big). We positioned our homemade goals on either end of the driveway and mine was arguably the most pitiful assembly of wood and chicken wire east of the Mississippi. I was not known for craftsmanship, but it was hockey for Pete's sake and I had a pretty mean left-handed slapshot. Now it was faceoff time. I matched up against a worthy opponent. Sure we were friends, but this was hockey and that changed everything. This is where things get kind of fuzzy because it was 33 years ago. What I do remember is that at some point I think I scored and I was pretty happy about that and not breaking the garage door window. Good times.

The whole idea of the faceoff has had a major impact on me recently. Looking through the Bible, when you encounter Jesus, there is an amazing consistency regarding the result; lives are changed. I am convinced that when you come face to face with Jesus Christ, you cannot help but change in some way. Knowing this takes the pressure off of worrying what someone else's opinion is about something or how I might differ from them. Not realizing this can make God much smaller than He really is. I firmly believe the emphasis should be on directing the focus appropriately. Maybe we shouldn't be so worried about the issues or disagreements or differences of opinion after all. The Bible says to "fix your eyes on Jesus" and that is one of the best pieces of advice that anyone could ever give.

God bless you as you seek Him!

Dave Blough

P.S. I had the privilege of volunteering within the Travelers Community as part of JA Day at the Dwight School. It was the first time I took part in this type of event. I loved those sweet little first graders. They are a wonderful part of God's creation. I encourage you to show the love of Christ and volunteer as well using the Travelers Community Connection below.



# *Christian Fellowship* at Travelers

## **The Bunny or the Tomb**

*Dave Blough – April 2009*

I admit it. I believed there was an Easter Bunny that delivered baskets of goodies to well-behaved boys and girls all over the world. I believed that this bunny was able to do this in the span of several hours while those boys and girls were sleeping. I believed I was good (for the most part). My older sister Robyn was able to perpetuate this tradition for far longer than I will admit in this message. She laughs about it now and I remember enjoying plenty of candy and “stuff” for years. She also made me admit guilt to things that I was innocent of, but that is another story and she feels bad about that now. But I digress.

When you think of Easter, you may think of The Bunny or the tomb, or more specifically the empty tomb. I refer to the tomb as empty because the dead man Jesus did what He said and was raised from the dead. The Bible says that Jesus is the Son of God and Jesus Himself said the same. Easter, to the Christian, is the culminating event of Holy Week. Easter, to others, is about bunnies, Peeps and chocolate. Though cute and mostly delicious, there is greater significance to this week to ponder.

Holy Week consists of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Here’s a brief look at what you can read about in detail in the Bible (Luke 22-24 is a good passage).

### **Maundy Thursday**

It is a special time to participate in the Lord’s Supper. Maundy comes from the Latin word for “commandment” and speaks to the new commandment that Jesus gave the disciples at the Lord’s Supper which was to love one another as Christ loved them. Also, some imitate the washing of feet as was done by Christ to the twelve.

### **Good Friday**

This is a day that marks the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

- Christ died. He had the living daylight hours pounded out of Him and His flesh ripped from Him prior to being crucified, the most painful and torturous process inflicted on any human. This was perfected by the Romans. They were professionals and they knew how to get the job done.
- Christ was buried. He was bound in wrappings and spices completely, placed in a tomb that was sealed and guarded. When I say guarded, I mean that the crucified and dead Christ had the type of guard watching Him that if failed, would be punished by death upon failure.

### **Easter Sunday**

Christ rose from the dead. The tomb was empty and the grave clothes were left behind. There were 15 occurrences of Christ being seen post resurrection in which hundreds of people were eyewitnesses.

William Lane Craig said that “Without the belief in the resurrection the Christian faith could not have come into being. The disciples would have remained crushed and defeated men. Even had they continued to remember Jesus as their beloved teacher, his crucifixion would have forever silenced any hopes of his being the Messiah. The cross would have remained the sad and shameful end of his career. The origin of Christianity therefore hinges on the belief of the early disciples that God had raised Jesus from the dead.

So, there you have it. I believe in the resurrected Christ as it is so significant to my faith. Personally, we don’t tell our kids that there is an Easter Bunny, but we do hunt around for candy and I sneak more than my share of chocolate.

If you are interested in learning more about Holy Week, just let me know and we can talk about it. Thanks for allowing me to take a few minutes of your time.

God bless you as you seek Him!

Dave Blough

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Christian Fellowship at Travelers



Why is the Bible so Important?

Dave Blough – March 2009

When it comes to Christianity, a conversation about the Bible becomes really important. The Bible is God's Word and every part of it is truth. Everything I need to know and learn about God and life is discovered in the Bible. I believe it completely because it is completely true. Many have struggled with its authority and impact, but I have some thoughts I can share from both a practical and factual perspective.

At a practical level, my life has changed since I became a Christian and began reading the Bible. You might be interested to know that I was raised the youngest of five children in West Hartford, Connecticut, which is not too far from the capitol city of Hartford. Even though my family attended a local church just about every Sunday, I just was not connecting with God. As a child, I remember always wanting to have a two-way conversation with Jesus and would even find time to be at church when no one else was there just to talk with Him. I guess you could say I was drawn to Him without fully comprehending why. I never read the Bible though and no one ever really entrusted me with the things I should know. I do not say this to place any blame on anyone as I take full responsibility for my actions or lack thereof.

Most of my teenage years could be described as rebellious and mostly self-centered. I am ashamed to say that I made many poor decisions that did not reflect a favorable character. That all changed when I began a dating relationship in my senior year of high school with a beautiful young woman who, three years later, would become my wife. I remember Cheryl expressing a need to speak with me about something very important to her. It was at that time she shared with me about her faith in Jesus Christ and what it meant to her. She wanted me to know where she stood and it took courage to do so! I was impacted by her strong faith and accepted an invitation to attend her church at the time. I was pretty excited about going there because it was refreshing to me. She soon presented me with my first Bible and I began to read it voraciously and believed in its truth. I responded to God's pursuit of me by acknowledging that I believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He alone is able to forgive my sin. God's Word became very real to me.

The changes that have taken place since then attest to the power of God's Word and His work in me. The most significant thing I have learned over time is how to love Him and love others. The Bible has taught me about compassion through one of my favorite stories when Christ healed ten lepers. They were truly outcasts in their day, but He showed mercy. There is another story where Jesus meets up with two men on the road to Emmaus. The men were grieving from the news that Jesus had been crucified and did not recognize the resurrected Jesus as He journeyed with them. Jesus invested His time to show them about Himself in the Scriptures. Imagine that! I guess that is why I am partly writing this message today. I want you to know about Him as well.

Jesus, to me, is more than a great Person, I call Him my Savior. If you know me, you also know that I am not perfect, but despite my shortcomings and weaknesses God has used me to do many things. My wife has loved me enough to be married to me for almost twenty-five years. I love being a husband! With that, I have been blessed with five children! If that were not enough, I have been able to share what I have learned from the Bible with many people both young and old. I have enjoyed using the abilities He has given me to lead at church, within the homeschool movement, in my own community and even at my place of work. The credit of any accomplishment belongs to the transforming work of Christ and the power of God's Word.

As to the facts surrounding the authority of the Bible, I have many interesting things to share with you. First, the Bible is God's Word! It is known as the canon of scripture and it has a literal meaning of a standard. In actuality, it is comprised of many books, sixty-six precisely, that have been measured and approved. Its main divisions are the Old Testament and the New Testament. There were laws that God wrote down for His people to follow and He gave them to Moses in the form of tablets. You may remember these laws to be the Ten Commandments. As God revealed more about Himself throughout history, they were written down and kept safe by His people. You can be assured that what had been kept safe is what you can read today. God has issued warnings not to add or take from it unless it was under His direction. The writing for the Old Testament ceased around 435 B.C. and God was silent for the next four hundred years until Christ was born.

The life of Christ on earth took place early in the first century. After He died, what is known as the New Testament began to take form. The New Testament is relevant because of who Jesus Christ is. According to the Bible, He is God who died, was buried, and rose from the dead.



Christian Fellowship at Travelers

In order for a book to be part of the Bible, there were some criteria. Old Testament prophets, those proven to have spoken God's Word by having it realized, recorded what God wanted us to know. If you were someone who lived with Jesus, such as the apostles John, Peter or Paul, what you wrote was the result of that promise by Jesus to the apostles that the Holy Spirit would help them remember and guide them to the truth. The same would be applied to close associates of the apostles such as Luke or Mark. Apostles were known to have divine authority because of their close relationship with Jesus. Other criteria, such as the Scripture not contradicting itself and that it was accepted by those who originally heard it, was important. By the end of the 4th century there was agreement, by two significant church councils, that what we know as the sixty-six books of the Bible today was recognized as God's Word.

You should also know that the Bible is inspired, which literally means it is God-breathed. What is that all about? Basically, the Bible is not something that men just made up. The Bible describes Scripture as men being moved to write it as directed by Holy Spirit. They were consciously aware of what they were doing and communicated what God wanted them to using their own style. God used imperfect men to communicate the perfect truth.

Some have said that only parts of the Bible are true, but I have issues with statements of this nature. Who could possibly determine which parts of the Bible are true or not anyway? Could we presume to have a higher authority than God Himself? In terms of reliability and confidence, scholars have examined and compared thousands of manuscripts and only a minor part of the text remains difficult to determine, though generally, the meaning can be discerned within context. Even so, these same scholars agree that the Bible is still without error.

If you are still concerned about the integrity of the content of the Bible, there is universal agreement and no strong objection among believers that no other letters should be added or taken away from the Bible. Jesus provided His stamp of approval on the Old Testament and promised that the Holy Spirit would help the apostles remember what to write for the New Testament. Archaeologists have verified, using historical artifacts, the accuracy of the Bible. If these things were insufficient, we see an unparalleled consistency with the Bible written by its many writers spanning one and one half millennium.

This brings me to a point about God's character that is important in light of all that I have shared with you already. God's Word is truth, so everything He communicates to you can be relied on without error in any part. God has proven Himself to be truthful and you can see for yourself as you read through the Bible. It is in His nature not to lie so when the Bible states that that the Scripture is His Word, it has to be so.

I wonder. Have you seen God reveal Himself to you in some way? For instance, if we even glance at the world around us, we see some of God's attributes visible in creation. The complexity of human beings, the earth's ability to sustain life with oxygen, food and water, the constellations, the phases of the moon precisely within its monthly cycle are but a few of the things that point to someone or something that is powerful and orderly. Have you thought about these things?

God continues to provide in ways that even I seem to take for granted. I never lack for food, which is a condition most of the population enjoys. In my lifetime I have had many cuts and bruises, sprained ankles, colds, and even a ruptured spleen, bruised kidney and cracked rib that I was able to heal from. With these instances there was no dramatic intervention on mankind to take care of me. I attribute this to God's kindness towards me.

Looking through history you cannot deny the fact that the Bible is unstoppable. Many rulers have been unsuccessful in destroying it and the people that believed in it, but the greater the persecution of Christians the greater the circulation of God's Word. Its content is unmatched and its compilation extraordinary considering its unity as one book, one moral standard and one plan of salvation by some forty different authors over a period of about 1600 years. The Bible has transformed the lives of those who live by it and it is the only book to have proved time and time again its ability to predict the future speaking to the fact that God is omniscient. Its presence is astounding. I read recently from Wycliffe USA on the Internet that almost two-thirds of the approximately 7,000 spoken languages in the world having some sort of Bible translation available and hundreds of millions of hardcopies distributed. With the internet, its accessibility is even greater. It is the most read work of literature there has ever been and has changed countless lives like my own.



Christian Fellowship
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The most reliable way to know about God and His plan for salvation is through the Bible. Your own feeling or intuition on the subject is insufficient. In order to know the plan we need a reliable source. It seems reasonable that if there is a God who has power and authority that He would want to find a way to reveal Himself. The Bible is the way God has chosen to reveal Himself and its truth and its benefits are awesome to those who believe it. Believers can be properly equipped to do whatever God needs him or her to do. It is useful to instruct, correct and train the Christian adequately to live in this world with all the wisdom he or she will need.

Now that I have shared with you how important the Bible is to me, how it became recognized as the Bible, and why you can count it as trustworthy, I am very interested in what you think, what seems reasonable to you and what you may find difficult to understand. Let's have a dialogue!

God bless you as you seek Him!

Dave Blough



Christian Fellowship
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EL ROI

Dave Blough – February 2009

There is something very special and significant in a name. I have always liked my name and its variations. If you have known me over the years you have heard me referred to as Dave, David, and even David Francis. If you drop by my office you will see the many different name tags I have accumulated over the years with these variations. If you are a family member of mine you have the privilege of using a rather personal and possibly embarrassing name. If you are on my project team and I am getting on your nerves or have upset you, you might have referred to me as a not-so-friendly name. Names do carry a meaning and David, which is of Hebrew origin, means “beloved.” I think that is kind of nice.

I titled this month’s message EL ROI because it is a name of God that means “The God Who sees me” and what better time than now to be aware of this. God does have eyes to see and ears to hear you. There is nothing in your life that escapes Him. There is a good possibility you have been impacted by the economic crisis. Jobs have been lost, bank accounts have diminished, and foreclosures are on the rise. This may cause you some concern and I understand this, but we have “The God Who sees.” We do have a place to bring our concern. God tells us to cast our cares upon Him because He cares for us.

Do you remember reading about a guy named Sully recently? Capt. Chesley Sullenberger landed his plane in the Hudson safely and saved 155 lives he said that "Circumstance determined that it was this experienced crew that was scheduled to fly that particular flight on that particular day, and I know I can speak for the entire crew when I tell you we were simply doing the jobs we were trained to do." I am here to tell you that with “The God Who sees”, there is no circumstance that escapes Him and even God has a job. He came to earth in the flesh to make things right.

I recently heard a song titled “Your Name” by Phillips, Craig & Dean. The chorus sings of Jesus in the following way:

Your Name is a strong and mighty tower
Your Name is a shelter like no other
Your Name, let the nations sing it louder
'Cause nothing has the power to save
But Your Name

The lyrics are true! If you would like to know more about the saving power of Jesus Christ, just ask me as I would be happy to share with you what I know.

God bless you!

Dave Blough



Christian Fellowship at Travelers

The Unfolding of the Great Commission

Dave Blough – January 2009

When Jesus issued the Great Commission to the eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee about 2,000 years ago, who could have imagined the exponential growth that would take place in the early church other than God? While the numbers are incredible, the development of the nascent church was miraculous. That Jesus entrusted this mission of building the church to His disciples and that very trust extends to His followers today, is mysterious.

The New Testament book of Acts details the geographic expansion of Christianity and the key personalities that proliferated the gospel to the ends of the earth. It cannot be emphasized enough the role of the Holy Spirit who enabled the church to grow with power. This power, which bore the fruit of eternal life and transformed lives, was manifested by delivering God's hope of salvation in Jesus Christ. Salvation is the very core of the gospel which means "good news" or "glad tidings". God's Word spread resulting in an increased number of disciples.

The divisions in Acts that show the progression of evangelistic centers begin in the first 10 chapters of Acts with Jerusalem with other key centers of Samaria and Caesarea. Chapters 11 through 21, reveal Antioch (not Antioch Pisidia) as the evangelistic center with other key centers of Asia Minor, now part of modern day Turkey, and Greece. The last 25% of Acts, Luke devotes to Paul as a prisoner of the Roman government for more than four years. Paul's goal had been to reach Rome and it turned out to be a place where he was able to "[preach] the kingdom of God, and [teach] concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered." It is interesting to note that the gospel was not deemed illegal by the Romans.

Two prominent individuals also played roles. In the first 12 chapters of Acts the principal apostle to the Jews was Peter. Peter's ministry was in the seacoast towns of Palestine. He was the one who visited Cornelius in Caesarea, Philip the evangelist's home town incidentally (Acts 21:8) and converts the family. He experienced culturally shaping incidents where he had contact with the dead body of Tabitha (Acts 9:40) and lived in the house of Simon the tanner (Acts 9:43). The Jews considered these things defiling. His approach was to share about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and the listener response was belief.

Paul is seen as the principal apostle to the Gentiles who were referred to as the uncircumcision. They were looked upon as unholy and unclean. Even so, the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35), which was a meeting of church leaders to settle the dispute of salvation to the Gentiles met and decided that they would not turn away from the Gentiles but instead institute guidelines for Christian behavior.

Why are these two individuals, Peter and Paul, so important? There is no chapter in Acts where Peter or Paul is not mentioned. Between them, they reached both the Jews and Gentiles. Through them, miracles occurred, thousands heard the gospel message, and the church developed. There were other important figures as well. Stephen was the first martyr of the church in Jerusalem as a result of Saul, whom we now refer to as Paul, wanted to exterminate believers. The cruel persecution of Christians in Jerusalem allowed for the expansion of Christianity as Christians moved to other cities. Philip the evangelist was another important figure as the first named person to preach to the Samaritans. Also included are Barnabas and Silas who were traveling companions and a young man named Timothy who assisted Paul and Silas.

A good portion of Acts centers on the apostle Paul's missionary journeys. These journeys were a significantly influenced the propagation of the gospels through preaching and the establishment of churches throughout the world of that time. Paul had a pattern for advancing the gospel. It began in a major city following well-traveled Roman roads. It was the synagogue he went to first. The synagogue was a gathering of people or a place of gathering. It was a center for reading and instruction in the Law, place of praise and prayer, place of judgment, a school, and a community social center. Paul evangelized and gained converts. Those converts were grounded in faith as Paul carefully instructed them in God's Word. Before he left a city he appointed elders thus organizing the church. He also encouraged believers to share finances and goods; a practice of mutual support.

Antioch (capital of Syria), was a major launching point and evangelistic center for Paul. It was a place where Barnabas arrived after picking up Paul from Tarsus and the place where believers were first called Christians (Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16). Some sources show that the term may have originally been Chrestians which meant "those who did good things."

Paul's first journey (Acts 13:4 – 14:28) began in Antioch Syria, and spread to the province of Cyprus, its key cities of Salamis and Paphos, the to the province of Pamphylia with its key city of Perga and finally to the province of Galatia, visiting Antioch, Iconium,



Lystra, Derbe and ending back at Antioch Syria. How was this journey received? There were riots, contention, and Paul was brutally stoned. But there was also Gentile conversions, churches founded and elders appointed.

The second journey (Acts 15:36 – 18:22) also began in Antioch Syria then continued to Cilicia, the province of Galatia on to the key cities of Derbe, Lystra and Troas. From there Paul went to the province of Macedonia with its key cities of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, then to the province of Achaia to its key cities of Athens and Corinth and finally to the province of Asia to its key cities of Ephesus, Caesarea, and the evangelistic center of Antioch Syria. How was this journey received? Imprisonment and persecution continued, but more churches were founded, the sermon on Mars Hill was given and conversions were prominent.

The third journey (Acts 18:23 – 21:14) too started from Antioch Syria and continued on to Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus which becomes the center of evangelism in Asia, Macedonia, Greece, the Macedonian cities, Troas, Melitus, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea, and ended in Jerusalem. There were riots and warnings by the Holy Spirit to Paul but miracles and the establishment of more churches were in place.

As we look back to the days of the early church, the eleven disciples would almost be as amazed as I am of the ever-increasing eternal impact on humanity that the Great Commission has had. The seemingly simple charge of going, evangelizing, baptizing and teaching is now part of approximately 2 billion lives. The Word of God continues to advance, prevail, and churches are strengthened.

I leave you with the apostle Paul's word from Colossians chapter 4 verses 2 and 3 which says to "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ."

I encourage you to trust our awesome and living God!

God bless you!



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I Wonder

Dave Blough – December 2008

Over the past couple of Christmas seasons I have realized just how awesome the birth of Jesus Christ is. Maybe that sounds unusual to you. I have spent more time pondering it and am struck with wonder. Webster's 1828 describes wonder as follows:

WONDER, n. [G., Gr., to show; and hence a sight; a panic.]

That emotion which is excited by novelty, or the presentation to the sight or mind, of something new, unusual, strange, great, extraordinary, or not well understood; something that arrests the attention by its novelty, grandeur or inexplicableness. Wonder expresses less than astonishment, and much less than amazement. It differs from admiration, in not being necessarily accompanied with love, esteem or approbation, nor directed to persons. But wonder sometimes is nearly allied to astonishment, and the exact extent of the meaning of such words can hardly be graduated.

Maybe the definition and reading the following verses from the Bible's gospel of Luke (chapter 2 verses 8-18) may help you understand where I am coming from:

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

The words from the definition above that popped out to me were "great", "extraordinary", "not well understood", and "inexplicableness." An angel of the Lord, heavenly host praising God and a baby lying in a manger are extraordinary enough but a baby as a Savior is not well understood and perplexing perhaps. How could it be? This baby, Christ the Savior, was born of the virgin named Mary with an earthly father named Joseph. God entrusted the hands of human parents to care for Him. The Creator was raised by those in whom He created. It is too wonderful for me to grasp and yet I love it. I am thankful that I not only have a Savior but as I look around me and examine my own life, I really need a Savior. What about you?

On Friday, December 5, 2008 at Noon in the 3GS auditorium at Travelers, we will celebrate Christmas by singing some great songs together and reading about the Savior. I have attached the program and I look forward to celebrating with you. I hope you enjoy this Christmas with great wonder!

May God bless you!



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The Blessings of Obedience

Bill Very - November 2, 2008

Deuteronomy 28:1 "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth."

Obedience to the Word of God in Scripture requires faith in God and the help of the Holy Spirit to do what we know is right. Obedience to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives can be very different and much more difficult. It requires acting on the promptings of the Holy Spirit, which can be much less clear than the words we read in the Bible. God may be trying to get you to do something you don't want to do, in which case your mind will probably try to talk you out of it. He may be urging you to do something you have been wanting to do for a long time, in which case you may not trust that it is God speaking, but you may think it's just the desires of your own heart talking to you. How can you know if God is speaking to you? It's good to keep a few guiding principles in mind.

1. God will never ask you to do something that contradicts Scripture.
2. Others in the Body of Christ, especially proven leaders, will confirm the direction that God is giving you.
3. When you follow God's plan, in God's way, He will provide everything you need and open the doors that need to be opened.

God's plans will often defy human logic. What He asks us to do will often make no sense to us. But God's ways are far above ours, and His wisdom infinitely greater than ours. Only by trusting Him in obedience will we ever learn to know if we are following His voice; and only by obedience to that voice will we come into the fullness of what He has for each one of us.

I believe that God has a new direction for the First Friday Fellowship. My part involves turning over the headship of the Christian Fellowship to another one of our leaders, David Blough. Over the last several years, God has brought me into fellowship with David, and shown me his faith, his heart, and his ability to lead. But most importantly, I believe He has shown me that He has chosen David to lead the Christian Fellowship into its next phase of ministry. Please join me in welcoming David into this new role, and please pray for the Christian Fellowship to continue to be a blessing and encouragement to Christians in the workplace, and to reach out to those at Travelers who need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

James 1:25 "But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."

I pray that you will hear God's voice when He speaks to you, and that your obedience will bring you His blessings and advance the Kingdom of God.

~ Scriptures from the New King James Version of the Holy Bible

Staying the Course ... Obtaining the Promises of God

Bill Very - October 2008

Have you received a promise from God that seems like it is being delayed, or it may never come? Did you think you heard His Voice telling you to do something, but circumstances seem to get in the way? I have. But God has been faithful - He has not forgotten me, and He has not forgotten you. Let me share with you just a few Biblical principles that I think will help you obtain those things you thought God promised but may have abandoned.

First of all, God's promises begin in this life. John 6:47 says "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life." This is not a promise for the future, but an assurance of God's involvement in your life right now, if you believe in Him. In turn, we have a part to play as well. Promises from God don't come without principles and problems before we see His provision. We need to be walking according to what He has spoken to us. It is important that we "Walk in the Spirit, and not (only) fulfill the lust of the flesh." (Galatians 5:16 - parentheses is my editing.) When we cooperate with God, following His instructions, both what we read in the Word and what we receive in prayer and counsel, we can be "confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:6)



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God does His part when we do our part, but He never abandons us to work it all out by ourselves. Paul writes in Galatians 3:3, "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" 1 Timothy 4:14-15 also says, "Do not neglect the gift (from God) that is in you, ... Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all." (again, parenthesis mine)

What can hinder us in our progress? We need to persevere in the face of obstacles of all sorts, like unexpected life changes, such as the death or illness of someone close to us, or losing a job. Then there is a subtle obstacle we create ourselves - "disobedience". Speaking for myself, now, I know that discouragement can make the obstacles seem insurmountable, but I know that is not God's view. If I believe He told me I can accomplish something, I should not give up in the face of discouragement. If I believe I heard His voice, and I don't follow through, why would He tell me something different. If I have not obeyed Him in the last thing He told me, is he going to tell me something new?

The prophet Jeremiah prophesied some very harsh words to the people of Israel, " Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this? I will take up a weeping and wailing for the mountains, And for the dwelling places of the wilderness a lamentation, Because they are burned up, So that no one can pass through; Nor can men hear the voice of the cattle. Both the birds of the heavens and the beasts have fled; They are gone. I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a den of jackals. I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant" (Jeremiah 9:9-11), because they did not follow the Lord. "Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, nor walked according to it, but they have walked according to the dictates of their own hearts and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them" (Jeremiah 9:13-14). They followed their hearts and worldly influences instead of obeying God's voice. Our culture teaches us to follow our hearts, "be true to yourself", when really we should follow God's heart and be true to Him. Only then will we know true peace... and only then will we come into the promises He has made to us.

As Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." He has made promises to us. May they be fulfilled in His time, according to His will, for His purpose and glory. And we shall be satisfied in Him.



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Do Not Marvel

Bill Very - September 2008

As I was preparing for writing this message, I came across this verse which caught my attention in a way it never did before: Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (John 3:7 NKJV).

"Do not marvel" were the first words that caught my attention. Jesus had been telling Nicodemus in verse 3, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus' expectation was that Nicodemus (and others like you and me), would "marvel", "wonder", or "be surprised" at this saying. In the natural ("the flesh") this saying sounds strange to us, but Jesus here exhorts not to puzzle over it, but to listen with open ears to what He is saying about being "born again".

Birth is a traumatic experience... who would want to go through it a second time? But Jesus says in verse 5 ... "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The new birth is not one of flesh, it is one of spirit. 1 Corinthians 1:29 tells us that "no flesh should glory in His presence." Our flesh cares nothing about the Kingdom of God - only our spirit does, only when our spirit is "born again", or transformed by the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit.

"Do not marvel" says to me that this transformation is no small thing, or it would be easy to understand and accept. I believe God means that we must allow Him to radically change us in order that we may see His Kingdom. His Spirit must take our spirit and bring it through the trauma of a new birth. A "touch" from God is a marvelous thing, but is only a touch. We need more than a little touch to really see His Kingdom. A life influenced by God is a good thing, but is it enough to see His Glory? Only a transformed life will see it.

My prayer is that you will not be satisfied with just a touch from God, but that you will desire to see His Kingdom and to know His Glory in all of its fullness. Nicodemus asked Jesus, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? (v. 4)" We have already looked at most of Jesus' answer, but He also had this to say, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (v. 8) We can more easily understand where the wind comes from, than we can understand with our minds how our spirit can be re-born. We must come to God and trust Him to do it for us and in us.

Do not marvel that Jesus says to you, 'You must be born again.' Rather, accept the invitation to come into new life through the Son of God, Jesus, Who died and was resurrected so that all of your sins may be forgiven and you might have New Life.



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Love as Jesus Loved

(a simple message)

Bill Very - August 2008

Jesus gave us the New Commandment to "love one another as I have loved you" in John 13:34.

The first truth we need to understand about His love is that we didn't deserve it. "While we were still sinners" Christ died for us. And while we are still sinners, though saved by grace, it is difficult for us to love as He loved because it means **Treating People Better Than They Deserve!**

You have heard it called the "Golden Rule", "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". But Jesus really raises the bar when He says to us, "Love one another as I have loved you".

MT 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

If we surround ourselves with people we find it easy to love, what credit is it to us that we love them? If we avoid people who try our patience and kindness, how can we consider ourselves patient and kind?

It was not our good works that put Jesus on the cross. It was not our prayers that put Him there. It was not our repentance that drove the nails into His hands and held Him there. It was not our tears of sorrow that spit on His face. It was His love that put Him on the cross - because we could not do it ourselves. And His desire is that we, by His Spirit working in us, learn to give up what we think we deserve and what we think others deserve, and accept the grace and mercy that God has shed on us, and extend the same love - PATIENCE, KINDNESS, to ALL others - Christian or not.

Jesus taught us that LOVE means giving the ENEMY more than he deserves, whether it's the other cheek or the extra mile.

LOVE cares for the OTHER - prefers the OTHER. That doesn't just mean that we "like" people, or that we have sentiments of feelings of affection toward them, but that when their needs and ours are in conflict, we are willing to be PATIENT and KIND - Patient in having our own needs met, and KIND in meeting theirs.

The Golden Rule tries to make us all equal (I don't have to treat you any better than I expect you to treat me!), but LOVE makes us a servant. The Golden Rule allows us to give people what we think they deserve. LOVE treats people with grace and mercy, and gives them the feeling of being a child of God.

1 Corinthians 13:

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never fails.

You have heard it said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". But Jesus says to us, "Love one another as I have loved you".

Preparing for Multi-Dimensional Worship

Bill Very - July 2008

How does one prepare for Worship? How do you prepare to come into the presence of a Holy God, perfect in righteousness?

In previous messages, I discussed Worship as Spiritual Warfare, but today I would like to present the Multi-Dimensional aspect of Worship. Actually, if our Worship is focused on Our God, then it is as multi-dimensional as He is. Start with the Trinity - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - each with His own personality, and each just as much the object of our Worship. Our desire for Worship

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is born out of our knowledge and experience of Him in our lives. If I go through my week without thinking of how God blesses me every day, if I go through my week without thinking about how Great and Awesome He is, how genuine will my worship be when I gather with the saints to praise him? The way to prepare for corporate worship is to live a life of private worship (not meaning that we keep it to ourselves in public, rather that we cultivate a personal relationship of Worship of God every day, every chance we get).

The first and foremost dimension of Worship is our focus on God. By concentrating on His attributes, His works, His creation, we get the focus off ourselves and our problems. In the spiritual realm, this is excellent Spiritual Warfare! In focusing on God and praising Him with all we have within us, the Spiritual Warfare aspect takes care of itself.

Giving thanks is one of the most important parts of our Worship. In giving thanks, we give God the credit He is due for our salvation, His work in our sanctification, His healing of our hurts, His empowerment to live for Him, His provision working in our lives. Offering ourselves to Him, to serve Him, is another dimension of Worship that honors God, blesses us, and plays an important part in the Spiritual Warfare. A life offered to God is a fiery dart to the enemy!

There is a LOT going on in Worship, and often it is all happening at the same time! We praise God just for Who He Is; we give Him thanks; we tell of all He has done for us; we offer ourselves to Him. And while God is not obligated to respond to us, and is totally worthy to receive all of our Praise and Worship, He still blesses us with His Awesome Presence, filling us with His Holy Spirit, healing our hurts, our failed relationships, and renewing our faith in Him. As we give ourselves to Him, He renews in us the spirit of adoption as sons of God, by which we cry out to Him, "Abba, Father, Jesus..."

No matter where you are in Worship, God is ready to meet you, through the grace of Jesus, who died for our sins. He is ready to do more than meet you - He is ready, willing, and able, to bless you in your spirit. How can you prepare for this? I am not one to advocate a religious formula, but there are some things we can meditate on and try to live that will help us enter into the Worship of the God Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. David gave us some of these things to meditate on and to proclaim, in 1 Chronicles 16:

8 Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples!
9 Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works!
10 Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD!
11 Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face evermore!
12 Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth,
13 O seed of Israel His servant, You children of Jacob, His chosen ones!

We were made to worship, and we all worship something, whether we realize it or not. My prayer is that we will all increase in our Worship of God; that as we Worship Him, we allow Him to transform us into the image of His Son, Jesus, the express image of the Father; and that we will live our lives by the Holy Spirit.

Luke 11:9 So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 11 If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

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Worship as Spiritual Warfare, part 2

Bill Very - April 2008

Why should we think of "warfare" in the same context as "worship"? Isn't church a place we go to so we can experience peace and harmony and the love of God? I say, "absolutely". But, as Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant" (1Cor. 12:1)

Last month I mentioned an enemy who does not want us to worship God. Paul also writes to us, "... we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."(Ephesians 6:12-13) This is the language of warfare!

The bad news is that we are no match for these spiritual forces in high places, but the good news is that Jesus has already defeated them. Still, we find ourselves, as long as we live in these bodies of flesh, still in a battle. If we're in a battle, we can't put our heads in the sand. We're "sitting ducks" if we do, so here is my pep talk to all you who find yourself in the battle.

Nobody goes to war without the goal of winning. Yes, we want to "fight the good fight", but we're shortsighted if that is our only goal. Satan has already been defeated, and has no authority, but he doesn't think we know that - he thinks we have little faith. Let's show him what we really have (and if you don't think you have what it takes... Jesus does!)

Spiritual Warfare takes place in both corporate and personal (private) worship, whenever we put our emotional and/or physical energy into our adoration of the Living God... Who gave His Son for our present and future salvation. Whenever we invest ourselves in uniting with the rest of the Body of Christ in humble yet passionate worship of the One who gave His Life for us on the Cross, we are defeating the enemy. When we set aside, for the moment, the weaknesses of our flesh, our differences with our brothers and sisters, and our complaints against God, so that we can join our hearts and minds in Worship of Him... when we give our whole self, body included, to giving Thanks, and Praise and Honor to the true King of Kings and Lord of Lords... we mount a tremendous assault on the forces of the anti-Christ, and win a great victory for the Kingdom of God.

This should be the normal Christian life of worship. As Jesus said to Peter, "... I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."(Matt. 16:18) The enemy will not prevail, so don't give up! Each time you enter into Worship, don't give up until the enemy is completely out of the picture and you find yourself face to face with the Living God, Jesus, the King, seated at the right hand of the Father, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.



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Worship as Spiritual Warfare

Bill Very – March 3, 2008

I don't usually get up on a Sunday morning and get ready for church by thinking about going to war. Maybe I should. After all, it is written in the New Testament, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8)" The devil is like a roaring lion, desiring to eat up Christians while they are unaware of what is going on. How does he do this?

First of all, he wants to steal the worship of God. Another name for the devil is Lucifer, the angel who rebelled and took 1/3 of the angels with him, and the nature of his rebellion was that he wanted the praise that is due to God. Lucifer is jealous of God's throne, so when we praise him, it makes Lucifer angry. After all, in the Psalms it is written, "But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel. (Psalm 22:3)". Lucifer, or satan, doesn't want to admit that he has lost a battle. Isaiah records, "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! (Isaiah 14:12)" Just as he "weakened the nations", his desire is to weaken us, to make our Worship of God ineffective.

How does the enemy weaken our worship?

He makes us feel unworthy by reminding us of the sins which Christ has put as far away from us as the East is from the West. He divides the body by encouraging us to magnify our differences in our minds, rather than see the strengths we have when we are unified in Christ Jesus. He sends any other distractions our way to keep us from thinking about our God and how marvelous He is... what He has done on the cross to redeem us from our sins and bring us into fellowship with Himself and each other.

So how do we make our Worship into Warfare? Do it the Bible way! Enter the sanctuary ready to praise our Awesome God for all He Is. The following verses are not about timid worship:

Psalm 33: 3 Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy.

Psalm 150:

- 1 Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament!
- 2 Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!
- 3 Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp!
- 4 Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
- 5 Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals!
- 6 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!

With every sound we make in Worship, realize that as we are exalting the Lord, we are defeating his enemies. The longer, louder, more intensely we exalt our God, the more we put the devil in his place. He would love to shut our mouths or soften our praises, because he is insanely jealous. As we set our minds and hearts on Our Lord Jesus Christ, on God the Father, and on the Holy Spirit, the enemy is put to flight, and we can come to rest, at least for a while, in peaceful communion with Our God and with one another.

Psalm 84:

- 1 How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts!
- 2 My soul longs, yes, even faints; For the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

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The Year of New Beginnings

Bill Very – January 1, 2008

Eight is the number of new beginnings, and I believe that God wants to bless us in 2008. He wants to make all things new in our lives. He wants to love us as we have never been loved. As I was preparing this message, I was meditating on the question of what God's Word says to us about cultivating our relationship with Him. How do we love God? What is He looking for from us? What He showed me was that He wants us to pursue Him, as He has pursued us. He has saved us through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man. Jesus pursued us, and in response, if we want to grow in this relationship, we must pursue Him.

2 Chronicles 7:14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Pursuing God includes "pray and seek my face". If God can ask this of us, then we can be sure He will be faithful to let us into His presence ("my face"). Until we get into His presence, the words of the Bible make no sense... or will seem to make sense, but we can be fooled by interpreting them with human wisdom, and not through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God wants us to understand the Bible from His perspective. Only then will we understand the depths of His love for us and the blessings He has for us.

The prophet Isaiah wrote, Isaiah 55:6 Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. What this verse says to me is, "Don't put off seeking the LORD, because there will come a time when God may not be available to us. He is available to us now, and now is the time to seek Him.

Luke says this to us about prayer, Luke 11:9 So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you...13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

The apostle Paul also writes about seeking God: Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

These are just a few of the Bible verses which encourage us to seek God. If we really want what God has for us, we need to do our part in our relationship with Him. Love is a two-way street. Let's not ask God to do all the work. He has done what we could not do for ourselves in the work of Jesus on the cross. Let us continue to pursue Him. Let us respond to Jesus, the lover of our souls as we hear Him speak to us from these verses from the Song of Solomon:

2:

10 My beloved spoke, and said to me: Rise up, my love, my fair one, And come away.

11 For lo, the winter is past, The rain is over and gone.

12 The flowers appear on the earth; The time of singing has come, And the voice of the turtledove Is heard in our land.

13 The fig tree puts forth her green figs, And the vines with the tender grapes Give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, And come away!

14 O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, In the secret places of the cliff, Let me see your face, Let me hear your voice; For your voice is sweet, And your face is lovely.

Let us hear the call of God to seek Him, in prayer, and in meditating on His Word.



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Jesus Didn't Come Just to Visit

Bill Very - A Christmas Message - 2007

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Think of the joy that the Christmas season brings. For your sake and mine, God Our Creator came to earth as a man. We will celebrate Christmas with scenes of Mary and Joseph adoring the Christ Child in a manger, angels singing "Glory to God in the highest", and the wise men bringing gifts. We will gather with families and friends to celebrate God coming to us, and we will give gifts to others in response to the love God has poured out on us. For many, this is the most joyous time of year. Even those who don't believe in Jesus are often caught up in the love and joy of the season and recognize that Christmas is a special time of year.

I've often heard people say (or wish) that every day of the year could be like Christmas. If that were so, would the Christmas season lose its specialness?

Every day can be like Christmas, if Jesus dwells in us. Robert Frost wrote a poem called "The Best of Rooms", which says, "Christ, He requires still, wheresoe'er He comes to feed or lodge, the best of rooms... the best of all's the heart." It may not be scripture, but I believe it is what scripture tells us - Jesus may have been born in a humble stable historically, but spiritually, where He really wants to stay - to dwell - is in the heart of every man and woman.

*It's not easy for a man to let Jesus in - He is perfection, He is Holy... He is God, and we are just men. How can He even want to dwell with us... much less "in us". But listen to what the apostle Paul writes in Colossians 1: "26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. 27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**. 28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present **every man perfect in Christ Jesus**."*

This Christmas, when you think of the Christ Child in the manger, let Him touch your heart like He never has before. He comes with the tenderness of a newborn baby, but with the power and love of the God Who created you and has plans which are only for your good. His desire is to come to you, to dwell in you, to heal you of every hurt and free you to be who He created you to be. Christ in us is the only "hope of glory". Christmas is a time for a new start. If you haven't done so already, let it be the start of a new, long-term relationship with your Savior. Let the King of Kings take up permanent residence in the best of rooms - in your heart.

Why Do We Have A Christian Fellowship?

Bill Very - November 2007

As I prayed about what message to bring you this month, the reason for having a Christian Fellowship at work came to mind. I think the best reason for having a Christian group at work is that it's good to know that there are other Christians in the workplace, so we are not alone in our faith. Often I hear of someone who was really excited to hear that we had a Christian group, a First Friday Fellowship, or a Bible Study they could attend. I also hear from people at other companies that don't have such groups, but wish they did, and it helps me appreciate what we have.

I like having a Bible Study during the week because it gives me a chance to get to know other Christians as we discuss the Bible and God's work among His people. It challenges me to "walk the talk" at work, and do everything "as unto the Lord".

A really important facet of the Christian Fellowship is the network of people we have praying for each other. There are many needs in the Body of Christ, and it is encouraging to know that people with faith in God to answer prayer are taking our needs to Jesus in prayer. It's also encouraging when you have been praying for somebody and the prayer is answered!



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It is worth mentioning what the Christian Fellowship is not: it is not church, or a replacement for the local church - we believe in membership and involvement in a local church. But during the week, when you may not be able attend your local church, you might be able to attend one of our meetings and be blessed by the Word, some Bible teaching, and fellowship.

We would also like to hear from you. If you would like to share your thoughts about the Christian Fellowship, please email us at cftrav@comcast.net

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Your Place In The Net

Bill Very - October 2007

Recently God gave me a vision of his believers as knots in a fisherman's net. The interpretation of this vision, was that we need to be well connected to the knots next to us in the net, or we would not be very good at holding the catch - fish, or men. Notice the mention of nets (dragnets) in the passages which follow.

In Matthew 13, Jesus says: 47 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, 48 which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away."

In Luke 5 we read:

1 So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, 2 and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing *their* nets. 3 Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. 4 When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." 6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. 7 So they signaled to *their* partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; 10 and so also *were* James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." 11 So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

God has placed us where we are in the net according to His purposes. He knows who is next to us in the net. How good would the net be if each knot were not tied tightly to the ones next to it? Under stress, the net would unravel, and the catch would start getting away. We are meant to be tightly connected to those around us, or holes may develop in the net, and some of the catch could escape - which might be good if you are a fish, but for those destined for the Kingdom of God, there is a real safety in a well-kept, secure net.

Knots being tied tightly is the the only requirement for a good net, of course. The cords of the net need to be cleaned regularly or they will wear out prematurely and there will be tears in the net. We need to maintain the relationships in our lives, beginning with those we find close to us.

What an honor it is to be in God's net. I pray that you will see God's purposes in where you have been placed, and that you will find the grace and mercy to keep yourself well connected to those near you.

Is Jesus All You Need?

Bill Very - September 2007

Sometimes "pat answers" can seem shallow. Have you ever been in a situation where somebody gave you that kind of an answer, but you really were looking for more - like someone to care about you (you need a real friend), or help with your finances (you need more money), or a medical breakthrough (you'd take a miracle!) - and they simply said, "All you need is Jesus"?

Depending on where you are in your spiritual life, "All you need is Jesus" could sound like an insult or it could be a source of real encouragement. Let's not judge either side of the conversation, but take a look at what Jesus Himself said about it. Consider the implications of the following verses:

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life.

John 1:3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.



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James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

When you have Jesus, you have the creator and sustainer of the universe. "All you need is Jesus" is no pat answer. Whatever you need, He knows it, and He wants only the best for you, and He wants you to ask Him for it. You can trust the one who gave His life on the cross so that you could be restored to fellowship with God.

I don't want to sound simplistic, and make it sound like God wants to take away everything in your life that you don't want, and give you whatever you think will be good for you. He knows better than any of us, what we need. Even when the answers to our prayers don't seem to come, we can trust that God is doing **something** on our behalf.

As human beings, we have deep needs - not just spiritual, but physical, emotional, and psychological. We need friends, we need finances, we need our health. We need to be productive. We need to be cared for and we need to care for others. I'm sure you can come up with a pretty big list of things you need. Look to Jesus to be intimately involved in meeting those needs. It takes faith to believe that Jesus is acting on your behalf. It would be easy to give credit to those in the world who seem to be meeting our needs: our friends, our employers, our car mechanics, our doctors... you name it. But if we believe Jesus is Who the Bible says He is, then we must acknowledge that He gave each person the ability to become what they have become, and provided the means and the opportunities to be trained in the use of their gifts and talents. Who can take credit for his abilities? Did we create ourselves? Did we chose our parents, and determine our genes? Did we determine what country and economic status we would be born into? For "every good and perfect gift" I have been given, I thank God. I certainly appreciate the people in my life who have been instrumental in helping me get where I am - please don't misunderstand. But I consider them gifts from God.

Shall I blame God when things don't seem to be working out for me? I think that would be presumptuous on my part - Him being God and me being me.

If Jesus doesn't seem to be all you need, I hope you will take another look at Him.



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A Virtual Faith?

Bill Very - August 2007

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

There is substance to the Christian faith. God has not just given us a feeling of well-being, and ideology, and a system of thought through which we can escape the troubles of this world. As followers of Christ, we have more than teachings - we have a God Who is intimately involved in our lives. Jesus left the glory of heaven to come to earth with a mission to be carried out among mankind:

Luke 4:18 The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.

Jesus went about teaching, preaching, and healing people. Children came to sit in His lap and He blessed them. Our faith has hands and feet and a mouth, and is active - and to follow Jesus is to do the same. We also have a mission to proclaim the Gospel ("Good News"), to help set captives free from the whatever binds them by telling people what God has done for us, and by sharing the blessings He has given us.

The Gospel of Matthew, in chapter 25 tells us,

34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

Our calling is not just to believe in Jesus, but to become like Him - to be His hands and feet and mouthpiece to those around us. Just as Jesus listened to what the Father told Him, we are to listen to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus did the will of His Father, we are called to do the will of the Godhead.

We are not called to live a "Virtual Reality of Faith". We are called to become the substance of faith - followers of the Christ - visibly and tangibly demonstrating the love of God to a fallen and hurting world.

Do you feel like you have nothing to give? Come to Jesus. Let Him forgive your sins and heal every hurt. Come and sit at His feet and learn from Him. He has the Words of Eternal Life. His love is not a "Virtual Reality" - it is life-giving and life-changing.



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The "Gift" of Love

Bill Very - July 2007

It is truly a gift to receive love! To have love, to be loving, to live love, to grow in love, takes time. Love hardly ever arrives in our hearts full-blown and mature! It must be developed in us. When we take on the nature of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, we begin to love the way He loved.

Let's look at "the love passage" - 1 Corinthians 13, in its immediate context. The preceding chapter is about many gifts given by the Holy Spirit, ending with these words:

"28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way." 1 Cor 12:28-31 NKJV

The church at Corinth was richly blessed with spiritual gifts of apostles, prophets, miracle-working, healing, and many others, which Paul encourages them (and us) to pursue. But his "do all..." questions point out that people in the church were jealous of the gifts given to others. He addresses that jealousy by telling them of "a more excellent way", which he talks about in the verses which follow.

It is important to note that Paul does not say he will show them "a more excellent gift". The word he uses, "way", could also be translated "road" or "journey", and refers to the way we live our lives. Love, then, is the more excellent "way to live our lives"

Jesus gave us teachings and examples of how to love, and His ministry is wrapped in the love He had for us. Consider these verses where He declared His purpose:

"17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: '18 The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD'." Luke 4:17-19 NKJV

"10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." John 10:10 NKJV

"25 Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live'."

We can't give what we don't have. The only way we can love like Jesus, is to come to Him to get life, so that we can give it away. Let's face it - the natural man (sometimes referred to as the "carnal" man, or "the flesh") wants the opposites of the character traits listed in these verses:

"4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." 1 Cor. 13:4-7 NKJV

We would rather not suffer at all - we are envious of people who seem to have it better or easier than ourselves - we like to parade our successes before our friends and enemies - we get proud ... you could fill in the rest. If we pray for God to make us loving (or prove that we are loving), He will test our ability to suffer, give us cause to envy, let others get the glory but not us... so that we will have the opportunity to grow in love... so that in our suffering we will remain kind, and in our trials we will not lose faith and hope, but will turn to Him for the ability to endure whatever comes upon us, and still be loving - not bitter.

The good news is that Jesus triumphed in love and promises to help us to do the same, if we turn from our own ways and follow Him. Why wouldn't we? After all, Jesus has the words of eternal life. He is "the way (love), the truth, and the life".



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Wisdom from Proverbs 6

Bill Very - June 2007

Proverbs 6 is the second chapter in a row that has a major portion addressing the dangers of adultery, but we'll address that in the next installment.

The chapter begins by warning us about the perils of entangling ourselves in the debts of others; contrasting the lazy man with the industriousness of the ant; and a brief mention of some characteristics of a worthless, wicked person.

Then we have four verses which jump out at us:

16 These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: 17 A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, 19 A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.

Ok, God, You have our attention. The first thing God hates is "a proud (haughty) look". I believe He is speaking about giving the perception of conceit. More than confidence, it means appearing to be arrogant and judgmental, looking down on others.

The second thing God hates is "a lying tongue" - one who habitually twists the truth, leaving out important details or speaking outright lies - even speaking what you know is accurate, but presenting it in such a way that it shifts the focus away from anything that may reveal his own errors or shortcomings.

The third thing is "hands that shed innocent blood". We must not break the commandment, "thou shalt not kill". This seems simple and easy to avoid for most of us, but if it could be interpreted as doing anything to take "life" from another person (the life is in the blood), then we come to understand that anything we do that dampens the spirit of someone else is something that God hates.

The fourth thing is the "heart that devises wicked plans". Even if the plans are not carried out, God hates the mind that would contemplate evil - any harm being done to someone, whether a friend or an enemy. Our desires - and prayers - for others, should only be for their good.

The fifth thing is "feet that are swift in running to evil". The word for "evil" in this verse means "evil, misery, distress, injury". If we habitually causes harm to others, whether it is intentional or not, God hates it. If we keep letting our bodies, our minds, or our hearts go places which lessen our brothers and sisters in any way, we bring the "woes" of God on ourselves. (see Luke 17:1)
Number six is "a false witness who speaks lies". This is different from the "lying tongue", because it specifically refers to the "witness". If what we say about others is false, whether to their benefit or their hurt, whether it boosts or ruins their reputations, God hates it. God is looking for "honest scales" and an honest witness coming from our lips.

Lastly, God hates "one who sows discord among the brethren". Expressing how we feel should be done honestly, but also in a way that is sensitive to the differences we have in the group. Our opinions should be given and our actions carried out - not in a way that ignores peoples' sensitivities - but in a way that recognizes and celebrates how our diversity brings a richness and depth to the relationships in our group.

Since God hates these six... seven things, we would do well to ponder them seriously, and examine our actions and motivations daily. May our lives be wholly submitted to Jesus Christ, and may we be witnesses of His grace, peace, and righteousness.

Let Him Who Has Ears Hear

Bill Very - May 2007

Do you want to stay out of trouble, be able to think clearly about spiritual things... to be wise in the knowledge of holy things?

Proverbs 5 begins, "1 My son, pay attention to my wisdom; listen carefully to my wise counsel. 2 Then you will show discernment, and your lips will express what you've learned", and goes on to give one of the strongest warnings in the Bible. In this and the next two chapters, the major focus is on warning about the temptations and downfalls of adultery. Three out of the 31 chapters of proverbs recorded by the wisest man to ever live, are almost entirely devoted to the perils of adultery.



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You may be able to say, "I don't have a problem with adultery", and you may be right... for now; but if you think you don't need to guard against it, please read on.

When Proverbs 5:3 says, "For the lips of an immoral woman are as sweet as honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil," they are not just talking about kisses. The lips also speak, and they can speak very appealing things. (Please don't think I'm putting this all on the woman. These verses were written in a male-dominated society and are directed at the man, and should be interpreted as putting the blame on the man for any adulterous activity that follows - even though "it takes two to Tango". Please note also, the the word for "immoral woman" in this passage really means one who is not your wife.)

Verse 8 give the best advice ... "Stay away from her! Don't go near the door of her house!". Don't make any excuses to develop any private relationships with someone of the opposite sex who is not your spouse. Instead, be sure you "18 Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. 19 She is a loving deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts satisfy you always. May you always be captivated by her love." And keep in mind that "21 For the Lord sees clearly what a man does, examining every path he takes. 22 An evil man is held captive by his own sins; they are ropes that catch and hold him. 23 He will die for lack of self-control; he will be lost because of his great foolishness."

I encourage you to meditate on the entire chapter 5 of proverbs. Ask the Lord to open up its meaning to you in its fullness. These verses are meant to instruct and guide you and me in the right way. I don't have the last word on this - Jesus does. I am not your judge, and don't mean to come across that way. I'm just writing a series on Proverbs, and we happen to have these three chapters that deal with adultery. Just remember thess verse from Proverbs 16:2, "People may be pure in their own eyes, but the Lord examines their motives,," and Proverbs 16:25, "There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death."

May the God of our salvation give you grace and peace, and wisdom to walk in His way.



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A Prayer for the Church

Bill Very - April 2007

This month, I want to give a simple message of encouragement to you. To that end, I turn to the Apostle Paul and his letter to the church at Ephesus. In this letter, Paul lays out for us a description of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and what is the purpose of the church. In the middle of the letter, he also shares his deepest desires for those who believe in and follow Jesus. This prayer for us, the body of believers, not only expresses Paul's deep love for us, but also shares with us a vision of the depth of relationship that Jesus desires to have with us, and what His indwelling presence is meant to reveal to us.

Eph. 3:

14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— 20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (NKJV)

The first thing that touches my spirit is the vision of Paul on his knees before God, lifting us up to Him in prayer. This giant of faith, once a fierce persecuter of Christians, a Pharisee of Pharisees before Jesus miraculously and dramatically revealed Himself on the road to Damascus, is passionate about us coming into an intimate relationship with Jesus.

Consider also, the phrases, "to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith". It is almost incomprehensible to me that Jesus would want to take up residence in the hearts of sinful men, but He does, once we declare to Him that we have forsaken our sins and trust in Him alone for our salvation. But not only does Jesus want to save us from the chains of sin and death, but He also wants us to know experientially the fullness of His love, that we can be blessed with "all the fullness of God".

I pray that you will find the time to meditate on this prayer many times, and that it will get into your spirit, and strengthen you - no matter what you have been through, no matter what may come your way.